**Reading 2**

**Prohibition Enforcement**

Advocates of Prohibition did not believe it would be necessary to establish a large administrative apparatus to enforce the law and as a result, the federal government never had more than 2,500 agents enforcing the law. Congress, anticipating general compliance with the liquor ban, budgeted only $5 million for enforcement originally, but several years later, the government estimated enforcement would cost $300 million.

For those who executed the law, the surest method of enforcement was to shut off the supply of liquor at its source. But consider what this meant. The coastlines and land borders of the United States offered an 18,700-mile invitation to smugglers while thousands of druggists were permitted to sell alcohol on doctors' prescriptions and many more bootleggers were contributing to the flow of alcohol.[[1]](#footnote-1)



http://www.hugoblack.com/album/chapter5.html

Below is an excerpt about some of the challenges of enforcing Prohibition from the 1931 **Report on the Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws of the United States. This report was c**onducted by the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement.

Dated January 7, 1931

**THE BAD START AND ITS RESULTS**

It must be said that enforcement of the National Prohibition Act made a bad start which has affected enforcement ever since. Many things contributed to this bad start:

* Federal administration has always been more unified than that of the states. Yet friction and want of cooperation in law enforcement has been a common phenomenon which the exigencies of enforcing prohibition have merely made more prominent. Our traditions of independent individual administration led to habits or tendencies of non-cooperation among administrative bureaus… Thus enforcement has fallen short of what it should have been partly because of this tradition and these habits of non-cooperation between department and department, bureau and bureau, and service and service.
* Another cause was the influence of politics. In the enforcement of prohibition politics intervened decisively from the beginning, both in the selection of the personnel of the enforcing organization and in the details of operation. This political interference was particularly bad some years ago in connection with the permit system. When inquiry was made into large scale violations, when [liquor] permits were sought by those not entitled to them, when attempt was made to revoke permits which had been abused, recourse was frequently had to local politicians to bring to bear political pressure whereby local enforcement activities were suspended or hampered or stopped. Nor was this the only source of interference. For some time over-zealous organizations, supporting the law, brought pressure to bear with respect to personnel and methods and even legislation which had unfortunate results. Only in the last few years has enforcement been reasonably emancipated from political interference.
* Constant changes in the statute and in the enforcing organization have also had an unfortunate effect. In eleven years the statute was amended or added to in important particulars four times. In consequence it may be claimed with good reason that administration of the law has not been as effective as it might have been.

Taken From: Enforcement, N. C. (1931, January 7). *Report on the Enforcement of the Prohibtion Laws of the United States.* Retrieved August 12, 2010, from Schaffer Library of Drug Policy: http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/Library/studies/wick/index.html

1. Adapted from:

   Allen, F. L. (n.d.). *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*. Retrieved August 12, 2010, from http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/Allen/Cover.html

   *Digital History: Prohibition* . (n.d.). Retrieved August 12, 2010, from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article\_display.cfm?HHID=441

   Kyvig, D. E. (2000). *Repealing National Prohibition.* Kent: The Kent State University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)